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### **Vocational opportunities of unemployed young adults**

This PhD thesis is about the situation of young people in Germany and their transition from school to work. Many young adults struggle with problems in these transitions. Adolescents and young adults under 25 years are highly affected by lack of apprenticeships and unemployment. Among the “not unemployed” adolescents and young adults, many find themselves “trapped” in the transitional system and bridging measures for vocational training and vocational orientation. Furthermore, the German labour market shows a vast increase of temporary work and short term employments, indicating a tendency change from normal to precarious and atypical employments. Under these circumstances many young people are depending on assistance for general and vocational integration help. Questions regarding design, planning and realisation of such assistance are highly relevant.

The promotion and support of employment has been a field of social work practice for a long time. As well as other fields of practice of social work, employment promotion was concerned with strong processes of economisation during the last years. These characteristic changes of the welfare state and their various consequences for the practice of social work in this field will be analysed within this research. Dealing with unemployment, individual activation has been a main focus of labour market and social policy within the last years. As different programs have been invented to help young adults become more employable in order to increase their chances for participation in the job market, this might imply and lead to the assumption that the main problem of unemployment lies primarily in the individual constitution and behaviour or “non-behaviour” of the unemployed person. Therefore the person needs to be activated and trained in order to better respond to the needs of the local labour market. This point of view seems to neglect the problem of structural inequalities within labour market and society and the possible resulting lack of chances and opportunities e.g. because of class, gender, ethnic roots etc. Another problem could be seen in the fact that people who are unemployed are usually depending on the supply of certain resources, like money, which can as a sanction be reduced to zero, when not accepting or following a job offer. This can force people to neglect their own preferred choices according to their own

intentions and goals about a “good working life” which they would find important for themselves.

Within this research the intentions of the young people for a “good working life” will be stressed. Unemployed young people, who are counselled, coached and eventually placed into jobs by local employment Agencies and the Federal Employment Agency within the scope of employment promotion and labour market integration efforts, will be interviewed. The basics of these integration efforts and their practical institutional handling will be recorded and explored analytically. The crucial point of this investigation will be the case management processes and their social and political (pre)conditions on the individual as well as on the institutional level. Within this context the professional identity, the interpretation logics and operating logics of case managers will be explored according to the consideration of basic capabilities.

The analytical frame is drawn from the Capability Approach of Amartya Sen und Martha Nussbaum. Taking the Capabilities Approach as a guideline makes it possible to identify imbalances regarding social sharing and realisation chances of individuals and certain groups within societies. The capabilities approach offers a frame, where questions of social justice, inequalities and participation can be discussed in a broader range and on a systematic basis, in which real freedoms of individuals can be identified and clarified. Especially for educational processes and processes of social work, the capabilities approach can open up new perspectives on how human development and well-being can be enhanced, under which conditions and what is required for that.

Therefore the questions of this research are:

How far are vocational opportunities and basic capabilities of young people between 15 and 25 years considered and enhanced in the counselling and integration process of the local Agencies and the Federal Employment Agency?

Sub question arising from the main question:

- A. On which explanation and interpretation models for the juveniles and young adults do Case Managers and Employment Counsellors build up their work with the target group? Which sorts of reflection are implemented according to that topic and which concepts and operating logics are present in the counselling and job placement processes?
- B. What concepts do the adolescent and young adult participants of case management and vocational counselling have about a satisfying vocational training and job situation? What chances do they get to realize those expectations?

C. What are the problems within the counselling work that influence integration processes and transitions to apprenticeships and jobs of adolescents and young adults, and how are these integration processes and the related problems seen and handled on both sides?